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ABSTRACT

Interschool visitation as a method of improving teacher morale and instructional effectiveness is discussed in this publication for school principals. The principals's role is crucial, and several steps that he/she should consider when planning and implementing a visitation are suggested; they include determining the need, choosing participants, and coordinating logistics of the visit. Advantages of interschool visitation include improved teacher self-esteem and increased learning of teaching techniques and materials, which in turn contribute to more effective teaching and more productive student learning. (LMI)

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Tips for Principals from NASSP November 1990

How To Improve Teacher Morale and School Effectiveness

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Tips for Principals *from NASSP* November 1990

How To Improve Teacher Morale and School Effectiveness

Positive teacher morale translates into greater student achievement. Conversely, when teacher morale is negative, student achievement declines.

As instructional leaders, principals are expected to spend a considerable part of their time determining ways to improve teacher morale as a fundamental means of positively affecting classroom instruction.

This improvement should include the usual and expected classroom visitation and critique, making the faculty members feel esteemed and valued, encouraging professional growth, etc. However, one of the most valuable means of improving instruction is typically ignored: to openly allow, actively promote, and financially support faculty members visiting other schools and classrooms.

Background on Visitations

The necessity and importance of interschool visitations has become increasingly apparent within the last decade. National studies and state legislation have resulted in profound changes in both curriculum and instruction. In the midst of these changes, some schools and school districts have provided leadership, ingenuity, and creativity that have placed them in the forefront of educational excellence.

These are the kinds of model schools and classrooms that teachers should visit.

One of the great tragedies in education has long been that innumerable persons have received their college degree and teacher certification, been hired to teach, been assigned to a classroom, begun their teaching career, and, years later, have left the classroom never having formally (or even informally) observed another teacher.

Imagine a lawyer, a doctor, or an engineer never having the opportunity to see a colleague (someone likely to be more skilled than they) performing his or her role in such a manner that allows them a different insight into technique and/or content that will then result in their own learning and growth. So it is with teachers as well.

What Is Interschool Visitation?

Interschool visitation is a carefully planned and coordinated effort to send teachers and administrators from their home school to another school with predetermined objectives on the part of both schools. Visits typically last one to three school days, depending on the intent of the visit.

Planning an interschool visit is like planning for classroom instruction: the better the planning, the greater the success. Typically, the principal or one of his or her designates is responsible for planning.

The first step is to determine if a need for an interschool visit exists, and to what extent. For example, if cooperative learning is to be implemented in the following academic year, there seems no better way for a principal to prepare his or her faculty than to first provide the appropriate orientation within his or her own school, but then to arrange an interschool visit during which cooperative learning can be seen properly modeled by other professionals.

An interschool visit could involve visiting a model school to observe a multitude of programs, or the visit could be narrowly focused. Thoroughly planning before the visit ensures that emphasis is placed where it is needed and intended.

While the emphasis to this point has been on observation, an equally if not more important part of the visit is the interaction between and among faculty members. This opportunity to interact with professionals within a model school is invaluable. Questions are asked and problems are addressed in a manner that promotes far greater understanding and insight on the part of teachers than could ever be provided by simply reading and studying.

Who Should Participate?

The purpose of the visit will determine who should participate in the visit. For example, if the mathematics department is interested in developing or refining a peer tutoring program as a means of improving students' academic achievement, the entire mathematics faculty could be sent on the visit.

On the other hand, if a peer tutoring program is to be implemented or refined in the mathematics, science, English, and social studies departments, then it may be that only the department chairpersons should be sent.

Without a doubt, the administrators and those teachers

who are designated to oversee the implementation of the program should be included in the visit.

The Role of the Principal

Ultimate responsibility for the success of the interschool visitation rests with the principal and his or her designate, who should consider the following steps when planning and implementing an interschool visitation program:

1. Determine the need. Could the entire faculty (or selected members) benefit from a visit to a model school or model school program?
2. Identify the model school or model school program to be visited.
3. Contact the host school.
4. Begin planning with the contact person in the host school.
5. Begin planning with own faculty members regarding what is to be achieved by the school visit. Include discussions of observation skills and interactions with other faculty members.
6. Coordinate all logistics surrounding the visit, including teacher substitutes, transportation, cost, and scheduling.
7. After the visitation, coordinate and direct an evaluation.
8. Assist in implementing any changes in the curriculum and program resulting from the school visitation.

The Value of Interschool Visitation

Logic and common sense should assure the principal that much can be learned from the interschool visitation, but recently a group of teachers who took part in such a visit overwhelmingly convinced me of its merits. Rarely have I seen such an excited, highly motivated group of teachers. It was as if they had been given a new outlook on life, a new perspective on teaching, a glimpse of the world outside their own.

One of their initial points was that the teachers were made to feel important. Just the fact that teachers were allowed to use a professional day in this manner communicated a great deal to them.

They received a clear and resounding message from the principal that they were important, the curriculum and instructional process was important, and the interschool visit is a basic way for learning and growth to occur.

Beyond teacher morale and self-esteem, the teachers were ecstatic regarding the different ideas, techniques, methodologies, and materials they had obtained from the schools and the teachers with whom they had been paired. This included:

- How to effectively deal with both large and small group instruction, ability-grouped and heterogeneously grouped classes
- How to plan more effectively as a grade level or subject matter team
- How to implement a peer tutoring program within the self-contained classroom.

In addition, many teachers gleaned useful ideas regarding cooperative learning processes, ways of emphasizing higher-level cognitive skills, and utilizing unique approaches to motivating students to learn content they often resist.

A number of teachers remarked that they had learned methods of employing music, an interest of almost all students, as a means of motivating students to learn.

Conclusion

The principal who wants to provide the instructional leadership with which he or she is entrusted should consider interschool visitation. A well-planned, on-site visitation sends a powerful message to faculty members. Teachers who are made to feel important, who are allowed to expand their world, who are placed in touch with educational leaders in their field, are those who will have high morale.

Positive teacher morale translates into more productive teachers, which in turn translates into more productive student learning. Appropriately planned, the interschool visitation stands as one of the most valuable means of improving instruction. It should be imperative experience for all teachers.

Written by Lloyd P. Campbell, professor of secondary education at the University of North Texas, Denton.

Tips for Principals *is a monthly publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091. John A. Lammel, President; Timothy J. Dyer, Executive Director; Thomas F. Koerner, Associate Executive Director, Editorial Director; Carol A. Bruce, Associate Director of Publications; Patricia Lucas George, Editor.*